DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 165 051 CG 013 120

AUTHOR Brockman, John; And Others
TITLE The Developmental Relationship Among Moral Judgment, Moral Conduct, and a Rationale for Appropriate Behavior.
PUB DATE Apr 78
NOTE 11p.; Best copy available; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (58th, San Francisco, California, April 19-22, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Psychology; Children; *Cognitive Development; Developmental Psychology; *Developmental Stages; Maturation; *Moral Development; Research Projects; Self Control; *Sex Differences; *Socialization
IDENTIFIERS *Kohlberg (Lawrence); *Piaget (Jean)

ABSTRACT

Piaget's and Kohlberg's interview and scoring methods for assessing moral judgment in children were empirically compared. Based on cognitive development and social learning theories, six hypotheses were tested on 139 elementary school children. After being interviewed, the children participated in a moral conduct task. Multiple linear regressions and analyses of variance were computed using the variables of age, sex, rationale, Piaget interview score, Kohlberg interview score, and moral conduct score. The Piaget and Kohlberg interviews correlated only 46% with each other. Results indicate that: (1) moral judgment increases with age; (2) moral conduct increases with age; (3) boys obtain higher moral judgment scores than do girls - - confirmed by Kohlberg's but not by Piaget's method; (4) girls conform to rules better than do boys; (5) moral judgment and moral conduct are positively related - - confirmed by Kohlberg but not by Piaget scores; and (6) provision of a rationale does not necessarily result in a higher positive relationship between moral judgment and moral conduct. Results support the cognitive developmental position, but may reflect differences in the instruments used, children's limited ability to use words and memory spans, and sex differences in social learning. A follow-up study was conducted. (Author/JLL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THE DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIP AMONG MORAL JUDGMENT, MORAL CONDUCT, AND A RATIONALE FOR APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

John Brockman, Terri Anderson, and Sara Armstrong[1]

California State University - Chico

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J Brockman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

A Presentation at

The 58th Annual Meeting of the

Western Psychological Association

April, 1978

ED165051

The cognitive developmental approach as presented by Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1976), holds that moral judgment, the ability to effectively perceive and evaluate moral issues, progresses with age through an invariant sequence of logically and empirically distinct stages. Just as the general cognitive stages such as concrete and formal operations develop as a result of the child actively interacting with numerous aspects of his or her physical environment, moral judgment stages develop as a result of active interaction with people in numerous social roles.

Since, in most western cultures, males are given a broader range of role-taking opportunities than are females, males as a group should be more advanced in moral judgment skills than females. Piaget and Kohlberg also propose that an individual's moral conduct is, to a great extent, defined by the stage of moral judgment he attained. From the social learning position Cheyne (1969) has suggested that the degree to which moral judgment and moral conduct is related is a function of the extent to which socialization experiences have emphasized rules

[1] The authors thank Mr. R. Gamette, Mr. H. Poston, the faculty at Sierra View and Neal Dow Schools and Mr. B. Matthews of the Chico Unified School District for their cooperation in the conduct of this study.

CG 013120

pertaining to specific situations. Thus, providing a rationale for appropriate behavior should enhance the moral conduct of children who are mature in their ability to make moral judgments more than in children who are less mature in this ability. Also, providing a rationale should result in higher moral conduct among girls, since girls are more sensitive to the punishment cues inherent in rationale (Aronfreed, 1968).

One purpose of the present study was to provide an empirical comparison of Piaget's and Kohlberg's interview and scoring methods for assessing moral judgment in children. Since Piaget scores are typically based on the child's choice of what behaviors are right or wrong and Kohlberg scores are based on the child's reasons why certain behaviors are right or wrong, the two methods may yield different results for the same populations.

Based on these cognitive development and social learning theories, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. moral judgment improves with age
2. moral conduct improves with age
3. boys are more mature in moral judgment than are girls
4. girls conform to rules more than do boys
5. moral judgment and moral conduct are positively related
6. providing a rationale for following rules results in a higher positive relationship between moral judgment and moral conduct

One Hundred thirty-nine predominately white public school children in Chico, California served as subjects. The children were from second, fourth and sixth grades with approximately 23 boys and 23 girls from each grade level.

I conducted the interviews measuring moral judgment and the second author, Ms. Anderson, conducted the experimental task measuring moral conduct.

Children were interviewed individually and privately for 20-30 minutes. The interviews were tape recorded. The Piaget adaptation involved asking the children seven (7) questions designed to measure maturity of judgment regarding moral realism, imminent justice and expiatory punishment. The Kohlberg adaptation involved asking the children to respond to questions from Dilemma III and IIII in Kohlberg's Standard Form Scoring Manual (1976).

Tapes of these interviews were rated independently by myself and Ms. Anderson. We were completely unaware of the subject's performance on the moral conduct task at the time of rating.

Thirteen to seventeen days following his or her interview, each child participated in the moral conduct task. The task involved dropping an alphabet cube through a tumbler and then recording the letter that came up when the cube landed. The apparatus was constructed so that there was equal probability that any of the six sides of the cube would appear on any drop.

All of the children were given two rules for playing the game: first, they were told not to drop the cube more than 20 times, and

second, they were told to mark the trial as correct only if they did guess it correctly. To raise expectations of how well they would do, each child was told that "kids who are real good at guessing might get 15 to 20 correct guesses."

Half of the children of each sex at each grade level were assigned randomly to the rationale condition and were given the following reason for conforming to the rules: "Remember it's wrong for you to give yourself plusses when you don't guess right because it isn't fair to the other children." Ms. Anderson then retired to the hall after instructing the child to bring her his score sheet when he completed the task.

When the child was through with the task, Ms. Anderson asked the child if he or she had given himself plusses only when he/she guessed correctly and if the child dropped the cube only 20 times. The child's responses were recorded.

The moral conduct scores were obtained from the child's self-report of performance and the number of times the cube was actually dropped, as measured by a tabulator hidden inside the apparatus. Multiple linear regressions and analyses of variance were computed using the variables of age, sex, rationale, Piaget interview score, Kohlberg interview score, and moral conduct score.

The Piaget and Kohlberg interviews correlated only .469 with each other.

Hypothesis 1, that moral judgment increases with age, was confirmed for both Kohlberg's and Piaget's interviews (r+.609, .538 respectively).

Hypothesis 2, that moral conduct increases with age, was also confirmed (r=.273, p .05).

Hypothesis 3, that boys obtain higher moral judgment scores than do girls, was confirmed when measured by Kohlberg's method (r+.176 p .05). No sex differences were found using Piaget's scores (r=.045).

Sex differences were also evident in the moral conduct scores confirming Hypothesis 4, that girls conform to rules better than do boys (p1.09).

Hypothesis 5, that moral judgment and moral conduct are positively related, was confirmed by the Kohlberg interview scores (r=.236, p .05), but not by the piaget interview socres (r=.131).

An age by sex by rationale analysis of variance using moral conduct scores as the dependent variable showed that providing a rationale for good behavior did not significantly influence moral conduct scores. There were also no significant interactions. Thus, Hypothesis 6, that providing a rationale results in a higher positive relationship between moral jugement and moral conduct, was not confirmed.

With Kohlberg's method of assessing moral judgment, these results support the cognitive developmental position that moral judgment increases with age, is positively related to moral conduct and is enhanced by varied social role-taking opportunities to which boys are more frequently exposed. The Piaget measure of moral judgment, however, was found to be related significantly only to age, and even then to a lesser extent than Kohlberg's measure. This may be a reflection of the fact that Kohlberg's is a more empirically and logically refined instrument. Also, Piaget's method has recently been shown to have a "recency-of-presentation" problem (Austin,

Roble & Trasbasso, 1977).

Or, it may be that some of the difference between the Piaget and Kohlberg results can be accounted for by the children's limited ability to put their thoughts or intuitive understanding into words. That is, Piaget asks the child to choose between two possible responses without having to give any explanation for his choice; Kohlberg, on the other hand, demands an answer from the child that includes his rationale for the particular response. Children may choose the more intention-oriented response in the Piaget dilemmas without knowing why they chose that, but, in the Kohlberg dilemma, the child must know why before he gets credit for the response. He's scored on his reasoning rather than the conclusion to which he comes. This may explain why Kohlberg's interview is correlated with moral conduct while Piaget's is not. Perhaps good moral conduct depends upon a past history of questioning the reasons behind behavior, not just decisions to behave in one way or another. In this light, perhaps girls who appear to be accustomed to blindly following rules, intuitively know the appropriate responses even though they can't explain the reasons behind the responses. This would be logical if we assume that girls have a history of being reinforced for the appropriate acts and have been either ignored or punished for questioning the acts.

The social learning position that girls more readily conform to rules than do boys was confirmed, but the explanation that this is so because girls are more sensitive to punishment cues is questionable, since the provision of a rationale, with its inherent punishment cues, did not appear to influence the behavior of either sex. There two possible explanations

for this are: 1) The social learning hypothesis that children associate a rationale with punishment cues would predict better moral conduct only for children whose authority figures used a rationale in connection with punishment. It may be that the children in our study did not have that experience. 2) The rationale provided was only a stage 2 rationale. If children with higher moral judgment do in fact exhibit better moral conduct when given a rationale, perhaps the rationale must be at their level or higher. Our rationale may not have been meaningful enough to them to affect their behavior. Several studies (e.g., Rothman, 1976) have shown that the effectiveness of a rationale was minimal when at the lower stages, (1, 2 and 3) and most useful at the higher stages (4 and 5) when the experimenter's rationale was one level above the subject's rationale. If our rationale had been Level 3 or 4, perhaps we would have seen some differences.

Although the change in moral judgment over age was as predicted, we must consider the possibility that limited memory span, vocabulary and general comprehension of younger children may play as large a part in determining their moral judgment quotients as does lack of opportunity for role-taking. For example, Kohlberg questions had to be simplified considerably and, still, it appeared that some were beyond the younger children's comprehension or ability to verbally answer. In fact, often it seemed that a child understood more than she/he could express in words. This is an area that needs further research.

The small amount of variance accounted for by our correlations is probably due to the large number of variables we were unable to measure or control. For example, IQ might be a contributing factor, but we were unable to examine that because IQ scores were simply unavailable. Also

interest in the game probably varied greatly among the children. A child who was bored with the game and low on achievement motivation (or didn't really see the game as a serious achievement situation) might not bother to cheat in that situation for those reasons rather than for any notions about what he "should" or "should not" do.

Although we intended to look at denial of transgression, this measure was dropped because only one subject admitted cheating. Essentially everyone who transgressed also denied transgressing.

Recently we ran a follow-up to try to determine whether sixth graders have an intuitive understanding of probability that second and fourth graders do not have. We took the apparatus into the classrooms and explained how it worked. Then we asked the children if they played the game, how many would they be likely to get right. We also told them that a good guesser would probably get 15 or more correct. Although this last bit of information undoubtedly colored whatever we could say about their knowledge of probability, it did demonstrate something else. There were no significant differences among the scores the second, fourth and sixth graders thought they would get. Also, the scores the children predicted for themselves were significantly higher than the ones they reported after playing the game in the experiment proper.

Many factors are potentially operating here. It may be that when a child inflates his score, he more often does so out of achievement anxiety, while a child who takes extra trials is more often just impulsive or enthusiastic about playing the game. In any event, the children in our study look as if they were making an attempt to be

Their reported scores were lower than their predicted ones. Interestingly, group pressure appeared to increase achievement anxiety. In this follow-up, we also gave the students a group opportunity to play the game. We dropped the cube one time and asked how many guessed right. The majority raised their hands every time.

I might note that we didn't have them write down the letter that they guessed, so they may have fudged a bit without really feeling that they were lying. The tendency of children to tell themselves "Well, I was thinking of that letter, too" may be as much of a factor in inflated scores as was intentional cheating.

References

Aronfreed, J. Conduct and conscience. New York: Academic Press, 1968.

Austin, V. D., Ruble, Diane N., and Trabasso, Tom. Recall and order effects as factors in children's moral judgements. Child Development, 1977, 48, 470-474.

Cheyne, J. A. Punishment and reasoning in the development of self-control. Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Santa Monica, March 1969.

Kohlberg, L. Moral judgement interview and procedure for scoring. Center for Moral Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1976 (a).

Piaget, J. The moral judgment of the child. New York: Free Press, 1965.

Rothman, G. The influence of moral reasoning on behavioral choices. Child Development, 1972, 43, 397-406.